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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 002217

SIPDIS

USAID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA FOR HAJJAR, HALMREST-SANCHEZ,
BRYAN, KHANDAGLE AND MARX
DCHA/FFP FOR LANDIS, BRAUSE, SKORIC AND PETERSEN,
AFR/SA FOR POE AND COPSON,
AFR/SD FOR ISALROW AND WHELAN

STATE FOR AF/S DELISI AND RAYNOR

NAIROBI FOR DCHA/OFDA/ARO FOR RILEY, MYER AND SMITH,
REDSO/ESA/FFP FOR SENYKOFF

NSC FOR DWORKE

GENEVA PLEASE PASS TO UNOCHA, IFRC

PRETORIA FOR USAID/DCHA/FFP FOR DISKIN AND FAS HELM

ROME PLEASE PASS TO FODAG

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT AS HARARE 2160 SEPTEMBER 26 HAD TEXT
ON THE RIGHT MARGIN TRUNCATED. THE CORRECTED COPY IS
REPEATED BELOW.

QUOTE

UNCLASS HARARE 2160

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID PREL US ZI

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS: THE FOOD GAP

REFS: (A) Zimbabwe Emergency Food Security Assessment

Report,
16 September 2002, Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment
Committee
(B) Harare 1141

¶1. Summary: The Zimbabwe Emergency Food Security Assessment Report prepared by the Zimbabwe National Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC), in collaboration with a number of UN Agencies, NGOs, the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and SADC, was released on 16 September 2002. This report raises the anticipated emergency food needs for Zimbabwe by 14% (35,000 MT) over the current UN appeal to 486,000 MT for the period September '02 to March '03. The report identifies an unmet cereal gap of 379,020 MT, beyond plans for a significant increase in the GOZ's total planned food imports to nearly 1 million MT of grain, and an additional 218,000 MT of requested food aid. The report, however, envisions virtually no role for the private sector to import grain, as a result of continuing GOZ restrictions on private sector food imports and sales. If the report's optimistic assumption regarding increased GOZ imports does not come to fruition, or if donors do not respond adequately to the appeal for additional food aid, then the unmet cereal deficit could rise dramatically and the food crisis could deteriorate rapidly.

¶2. While confirmed pledges have been received for about 25% of the WFP EMOP appeal to date, with unconfirmed pledges for another 25%, for a variety of reasons, the Mission believes that delivery of the remaining 50% (about 230,000 MT) before the next harvest season (March/April 2003) could prove more problematic. The vulnerability assessment also fails to address the possibility that the GOZ may not be able to import all of the additional planned amount of 651,000 MT to meet its total commitment of one million MT by that time.

¶3. If these optimistic projections of future food imports do not materialize, we estimate that the actual human food need gap (that amount not covered by actual production, and food imports by the GOZ, private sector, and donors) could increase significantly from 145,000 MT (assuming the GOZ meets its full commitment and the entire donor appeal is met) to as much as 1.2 million MT (if no additional GOZ and donor imports materialize). Given current actions and constraints, the Mission suggests that a more likely food gap scenario might be around 600,000 to 700,000 MT (if the GOZ meets only half of its stated commitment and current trends in donor contributions continue). This cable is to alert all concerned parties that extraordinary efforts will be

required by both the GOZ, Zimbabwe's private sector and the international donor community to minimize this gap, and avoid a potentially serious national catastrophe in Zimbabwe. In this interest, the Mission offers some suggestions for USG consideration in this regard. End Summary.

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13. The recent Vulnerability Assessment Committee report on the current situation in Zimbabwe identifies a remaining uncovered human food gap of almost 379,000 Metric Tons (MT), without any allowance for a cushioning Strategic Reserve (ref. A, p. 8). Based on this revised needs assessment, it calls for a 14% increase in proposed food aid imports from the 453,000 MT included in the current World Food Program (WFP) Emergency Operation (EMOP) appeal for Zimbabwe, based on the Zimbabwe Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) conducted in May (2002) by WFP and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (Ref. B), to 486,000 MT (ref. A, p. 22).

14. This revised assessment of Zimbabwe's outstanding food gap is based on several critical assumptions, principally relating to future food import plans by both the GOZ and the donor community. The Mission feels it is important to highlight these assumptions, as well as the resulting potentially serious implications for the on-going humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe should they not prove to be accurate predictions of what, in fact, actually occurs over the coming months.

15. Perhaps the most important assumption is that this estimated gap assumes an additional 651,000 MT of food imports by the GOZ (for a total of almost 1 million MT). Given the current parlous state of the Zimbabwean economy and government finances (particularly with respect to scarce Foreign Exchange (FX) resources), the Mission and greater U.N. and donor community retain serious doubts regarding the GOZ's ability to complete these ambitious plans and fulfil their stated future food import commitment.

16. The second major assumption is the proposed 218,380 MT of additional international donor food aid imports projected to the next harvest in March/April 2003. As noted above, the current WFP EMOP calls for 453,000 MT of food imports. As of September 20, the status of confirmed pledges to this appeal totalled 111,590 MT (about 25 percent). An additional 110,000 MT of unconfirmed pledges have also been reported by WFP, for a grand total of about 225,000 MT, or almost half (49%) of the total appeal. Based on these figures, it seems reasonable to expect that the international community will be able to meet its share of the VAC import commitment noted above within the specified time period.

15. However, even if all of these imports are successfully completed in time, according to the report, an estimated 379,000 MT food gap remains. Approximately 234,575 MT of this gap can be met if the full amount of the current WFP appeal is met, leaving an unmet remaining gap balance of approximately 145,000 MT. Hence, even if the full current WFP request is met, additional efforts will be required to ensure adequate food stocks throughout the country until the next harvest.

16. To date, approximately 70,000 MT of food aid has been imported (approximately 45,000 MT of which has been distributed). The vast majority of this was accounted for
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under WFP's original Zimbabwe EMOP which effectively ended in June 2002 when the current, larger EMOP began. This means, effectively, that in order to meet the VAC projections the international community will need to import more than the entirety of the current WFP 450,000 MT request between now and end-March 2003. Considering the lethargy of the response to date, the yet-to-be-satisfactorily-resolved problems associated with the biotech issue for US corn/maize imports, the continuing serious constraints imposed by government on NGO implementing partner capacity, and the increasing congestion being experienced in regional logistical operations (which can be expected to worsen considerably with the onset

of the rainy season in about one month's time), this will be a tall task in itself, regardless of the government's success in meeting its respective commitments.

17. The final point is that even if all of these significant commitments are met, a Zimbabwe food gap of about 145,000 MT will remain. Thus, at least some additional assistance will be required. Ideally, this additional increment could be met

through local private sector imports. In this interest, the initial CFSAM called for some 312,000 MT of private sector imports. However, due to government restrictions, Zimbabwe's private sector has not been permitted to fulfil its planned role in responding to the crisis. The figures noted above suggest the need for renewed efforts in attempting to get the GOZ to relax its current restrictions and allow private sector food imports to proceed. However, this also assumes that the private sector will be willing and able to respond, as required, given current government market and pricing controls and FX constraints/restrictions. Failing this, additional government and/or donor imports will be required (beyond the considerable amounts already discussed above).

18. To address this situation, the Mission suggests the following course of action:

-A. Hold the GOZ accountable for meeting its planned future import commitment of 651,000 MT. Otherwise, the donor community could be held responsible for over one million MT of food requirements, which we consider to be an unrealistic target even under the best of circumstances.

-B. At the same time, given the high degree of scepticism regarding the GOZ's ability to meet these requirements, the donor community must also quietly plan, on a "contingency" basis, for the possibility that the GOZ will prove unable
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to fulfil all or a part of its commitments.

-C. Renew efforts to get the GOZ to reform current policy restrictions related to the FX market, imports, sales and prices of essential food and agricultural commodities, and the role of NGOs and the greater private sector in food imports and distribution operations, which are seriously impeding the collective ability to respond to the growing crisis.

-D. Continue USG efforts to respond as soon and as much as possible to the current food crisis in Zimbabwe. Regarding the particular USG issue associated with biotech food commodities:
--Finalize and complete the current corn/maize swap deal with the GOZ as soon as possible;
--Work with the GOZ to develop acceptable "permanent" solutions to the biotech issue for Zimbabwe; and
--Determine realistic food assistance alternatives to biotech food (in the event that a more lasting local solution cannot be found in a timely manner). Recent discussions with government suggest that some type of monetized wheat program may be one such possible alternative, albeit with only limited application in urban areas.

-E. Continue to urge other international donors to increase and accelerate their commitments to Zimbabwe (both through the WFP program as well as through supplementary bilateral activities).

19. Comment: The recent VAC report serves to underline the seriousness of the food security situation in Zimbabwe. It clearly highlights the worsening nature of the crisis, and the need for renewed efforts by all concerned parties to avoid a potential major humanitarian disaster. The Mission believes it provides a timely reminder of the considerable efforts that will be required over the coming months in this interest. Continuing USG attention and support in this endeavour, as suggested above, will be appreciated. Sullivan

UNQUOTE
SULLIVAN